

**Environmental Assessment Amendment
For Expansion of the Avery Sand and Gravel Pit
Vancouver Indian Allotments V-179 & V-179A
BLM Environmental Assessment Number OR134-01-EA-2**

Introduction

A public review of the environmental assessment (EA) was provided from January 11 to 26, 2001 by public notice placed in The Dalles Chronicle Newspaper on January 11, 2001. The EA was also posted on the Spokane BLM District's Internet site for public review. Three duplicate comment letters were received from three separate entities during the public review period of the EA. Basically, there were four concerns in those comment letters.

One concern was about the overall cumulative effects on resources (such as air and water quality, aesthetics, surface disturbance, vegetative and wildlife, etc.) from the existing and proposed surface mining within the Avery, Washington, area when combined with effects from existing and proposed surface mining proposals in the vicinity of Dallesport, Washington. A second comment was about approval of expansion of existing operations contingent on the amount of reclamation performed. The third comment was an inquiry about the amount of water to be used in the proposal, and the fourth comment was about the use of 1990 census data in the EA. These comments are addressed below.

EA Amendment Response to Surface Mining Operation Cumulative Effects

The BLM has reviewed the potential impacts associated with air quality, access, cultural and archaeological resources, farmlands, threatened and endangered Species, surface or groundwater quality, groundwater quantity, wetlands or riparian zones, aesthetics, vegetation, and wildlife concerns for the existing and proposed Avery operations. These impacts were also analyzed relative to the potential for cumulative effects when combined with the current and proposed Dallesport area surface mining operations.

Air Quality: Considering all surface-mining operations in the project area, there will be some reduction in air quality due to equipment emissions and blowing dust. The current and proposed operations are all subject to EPA New Source Performance Standards for equipment and fugitive dust emissions. The physical separation of approximately 12 miles between the operations at the Dallesport and Avery sites should preclude any measurable cumulative effects from equipment emission and/or fugitive dust. Also, the mine/reclamation plans for both the Avery Pit (expansion also) and Eagle Point Mine include mitigation measures to reduce or minimize fugitive dust.

Access and Traffic: No new access roads are proposed for the Avery-Eagle Point proposals. Currently, a very small percentage (usually less than 20%) of material excavated from the Avery Pit is transported by truck to the local markets (The Dalles, Dallesport, and Goldendale). The truck traffic related to these operations will not increase. The majority of product from Avery Pit proposed expansion, as well as from the Eagle Point Mine, will be transported to the Portland area on barges. The market for rock materials within the Dallesport, Washington, area is

unknown, but the Ross Island Sand and Gravel proposed site will likely be developed to provide rock products to the Portland area, since their sources in that market area have been depleted. The expansion of the Avery Pit, opening of the Eagle Point Mine, and the potential production from the Ross Island Site in the Dallesport area will result in a small net increase in barge traffic (a few sand and gravel barges per week) to transport materials down the Columbia River.

Cultural and Archaeological Resources: There is potential for cumulative effects on cultural and/or archaeological resources, especially within the corridor of the Columbia River, which historically was used extensively by Native Americans. On the Indian Allotted or Tribal lands, the BLM and BIA are required to consult with appropriate Tribes and to conform with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The BLM must also consult with the State of Washington-Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (OAHP). Likewise, any surface-disturbing activities proposed on private and State lands would need to be reviewed by OAHP also. Both the Avery Pit Expansion and Eagle Point sites have had surface cultural inventories conducted. As part of the mitigation, a Yakama Nation Cultural Program representative will be onsite during soil and overburden stripping to observe for cultural resources.

Farmlands: The proposed Eagle Point mine site was previously cleared of vegetation, possibly in preparation for orchard production, since poplar windbreaks were planted and remnants of irrigation were noted during inspections of the site. However, it appears that fruit trees were never planted. The owners of the parcels have not determined the end use of the land, but it could potentially be used for agricultural purposes after reclamation of the sites. There is a peach orchard directly west of the Eagle Point Mine proposal and a vineyard about two miles west of Avery Landing. The current land use of the Ross Island Sand and Gravel parcel is unknown. This proposal would not have a cumulative effect on farmlands or agricultural lands. The reclaimed use may be agricultural.

Threatened and Endangered Species: No threatened or endangered (T&E) animal or plant species were inventoried, or are known to occur, on the parcels at Avery, Washington. Most of the Avery Pit site location has been disturbed since the mid-1950s, and the proposed Eagle Point mine site was previously cleared and was proposed for orchard production (poplar windbreaks were planted), but it appears that fruit trees were never planted. Much of that area is now infested with non-native weed species. The reclamation plan calls for reseeding with native species.

Surface or groundwater quality: No surface waters occur on the parcels associated with the Avery and Eagle Point Mine sites. Potential pollutants associated with the planned surface mining operations include fuels, lubricants, and coolants. Both the Avery and Eagle Point Mine operations have Oil Spill Prevention and Countermeasures Plans per EPA regulation, which outline the containment and handling of these materials. The plans will be certified by a civil engineer prior to implementation. Spills of fuels, lubricants, and/or coolants should be kept to a minimum by following the procedures outlined in the plan; therefore, no cumulative effects are expected on surface or groundwater quality from petroleum or coolant products.

Currently, the Avery Pit operation utilizes water from a shallow well casing (culvert). The settling pond lies within close proximity to the shallow well (approximately 100 feet). During

inspections of the site, the water within the casing has always been clean, and therefore it appears that there is no movement of suspended solids within the groundwater. All water from the settling pond either infiltrates, evaporates, or is recycled. Proposed operations at the Eagle Point Mine will also use a very small lined settling pond in conjunction with sand cyclones (trap fine sands) to recycle as much water as possible. There is no surface discharge (runoff) to the Columbia River, even during storm events. Therefore, the Avery and Dallesport surface mining operations should not have cumulative effects associated with water turbidity.

Groundwater quantity: Both the Avery and Eagle Point Mines anticipate utilizing approximately 5,000 gallons of water per day (10,000 gallons total). The majority of water consumption will be used for product washing and dust control. Some water will infiltrate back into the ground. About 75 percent of this daily water will likely be lost to evaporation, but this will vary significantly seasonally. It is not known what the current or anticipated water use is at the Dallesport surface mining operations. There is likely to be a small cumulative effect on water usage (ground water) for all the mining operations (Dallesport and Avery combined), but this should not result in significant impacts.

Wetlands or riparian zones: There are no wetlands or riparian zones on either the Avery or Eagle Point Mine project areas. The permit areas are located north of the Burlington Northern Sante Fe Railroad right-of-way (north of the Columbia River). There is no cumulative effect when combined with the existing and proposed surface mining operations in the Dallesport area, since there are no wetlands or riparian zones within the BIA permitted areas.

Surface Disturbance (Topography) and Aesthetics: Currently, there are approximately 23 acres of surface disturbance associated with the Avery site. Phased reclamation for both the expansion of Avery and the Eagle Point Phase 1 mining would account for an additional disturbance of 36 acres (7 for Avery and 29 for Eagle Point). The total disturbance at any time should not exceed 59 acres. Segmental reclamation would allow for phasing of reclamation and revegetation of the permit sites. As one area is being mined, another area will be concurrently reclaimed. Current reclamation bonds for the Avery and Eagle Point permit aggregate to \$351,000. The bond would allow reclamation of the site if the operator cannot fulfill their reclamation obligation.

As for the aesthetics, both operations in the Avery area will be visible from I-84 and the Columbia River. The Eagle Point operation will be more visible than the existing Avery Pit and expansion from State Route 14. When the Avery Pit operations (including the expansion and Eagle Point Mine) are combined with the existing and proposed surface mining operations in the Dallesport area, there will be a small overall cumulative effect on surface disturbance (acres disturbed) and visibility of the sites. The visual aspects associated with specific locations of the existing and proposed surface mining operations in the Dallesport area are not known.

Vegetation: No cumulative effects to vegetation are expected considering the existing and proposed surface mine development at the Avery area, along with that of the Dallesport existing and proposed operations. This analysis is based on the following excerpt from a memo written by William Bradley, Yakama Indian Nation Wildlife Resource Management Program, concerning vegetative assessment of the Indian Allotments associated with the existing Avery

and proposed Eagle Point Gravel Mines. "V-179" (Avery site) "has already been extensively mined for gravel deposits and provided virtually no significant habitat..." "The existing habitat on V-194" (proposed Eagle Point Mine site) "... currently supports a vegetative cover of introduced exotic noxious weeds and grasses, with little native vegetation present." Proposed revegetation will be with native species and will likely improve the diversity and percent cover of the area.

Wildlife: No cumulative effects to wildlife would occur as a result of the existing and proposed surface mine development at the Avery area when considering the Dallesport existing and proposed operations. This analysis is based on the following excerpt from a memo written by William Bradley, Yakama Indian Nation Wildlife Resource Management Program, concerning wildlife assessment of the Indian Allotments associated with the existing Avery and proposed Eagle Point Gravel Mines. "The two allotments in question have no significant wildlife benefits at present and would require substantial and unrealistic expenditures of mitigation money to reverse this trend." "Given the past history of commercial exploitation on V-179" (Avery) "and the proposed exploitation on V-194," (Eagle Point) "the best land use practice would be to recognize this land use as a commercial area, and direct any mitigation opportunities for wildlife habitat to an off-site location."

The physical separation of approximately 12 miles between the existing and the proposed surface mining operations in the Dallesport and Avery, Washington, areas mitigate potentially all of the local environmental effects. The attached table outlines those resources/categories that may, when combined with the Dallesport surface mining activity (existing and proposed), potentially contribute to cumulative effects. The effects appear to be minimal and would not result in significant impacts to cultural and archaeological resources, groundwater quantity, surface disturbance or aesthetics. See the attached cumulative effects table.

EA Amendment Response to Reclamation Practices

The specific example in the public comment letters of a mine site that has not been reclaimed was the Smith Pit. The Smith Pit is either on private or State Lands under the regulatory authority of the State of Washington's Department of Natural Resources. The Bureau of Land Management does not have any regulatory authority on State or private lands.

Both Pacific Northwest Aggregates (Avery Mine) and Wheeler Logging (Eagle Point Mine) have submitted detailed mine and reclamation plans. These plans describe the details of how the sites will be mined and concurrently reclaimed. As part of the permitting process, BLM makes reclamation bonding recommendations to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Currently, the BIA is holding two reclamation performance bonds totaling \$351,000 (\$222,000-existing Avery and \$129,000-proposed Eagle Point). An additional bond will need to be calculated for the Avery expansion, subject to that plan's approval. Should one or both the operators not fulfill their reclamation obligations as outlined in the mine/reclamation plan, the performance bond could be utilized. One of the main objectives of permitting the Avery expansion was to allow for reducing the slopes onsite so final reclamation could proceed on the northern perimeter of the active pit area.

EA Amendment Response to Water Usage

Section 3.5, Water Requirements and Resources, of the Mine/Reclamation Plan gives the details of daily and annual water requirements, water sources and uses. According to the plan, the processing facility, including incidental uses, will require 5,000 gallons of water per day.

EA Amendment Response to 1990 Census Data

The 1990 census data was only referenced in the Environmental Justice section of the EA, for the purpose of reviewing demographic data, including population. The 2000 census data was not available when the EA was prepared. However, no significant difference in population of the affected area was likely for the 10-year period.

The BLM has conducted extensive surveying of the Avery sites, including contracted aerial photogrammetric surveys of the site for the past three years (1998-2000). Topographic models of the site have been contracted by a private vendor, and additional mapping has been performed by BLM. These models will help define final reclamation of the Avery sites. According to BLM cadastral surveyors, the Avery site likely has some of the best ground control in the state of Washington.

Based on the EA, including review of additional information responding to public comments discussed above, the BLM has determined that the analysis of this proposed project considered all applicable resource values. The BLM concludes that the proposed action (Alternative A) would have no significant environmental effects, and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

Cumulative Effects - Avery/Eagle Point Mine Area and Dallesport, Washington Area Surface Mines		
Resource/Category	Cumulative Effects* (Yes/No)	Remarks-Avery and Eagle Point Mines
Air Quality	No	Physical separation of 10+ miles will limit cumulative effects.
Access	No	No additional new roads proposed.
Traffic	No	No additional truck traffic. Slight increase in barge traffic (1-2 barges per week).
Cultural/Archaeological	Slight Potential	No significant cultural resources were inventoried during on-the-ground surveys. Columbia River corridor has many cultural sites. Potential for future disturbance of unknown sites.
Farmlands/Orchard	No	No farmlands or orchard lands will be disturbed.
Threatened & Endangered Species	No	None noted in existing literature/databases or documented during inventories.
Surface/Groundwater Quality	No	No anticipated cumulative effects from turbidity, fuels, lubricants, etc.
Groundwater Quantity	Slight Potential	Approximately 10,000 gallons of water per day are to be utilized at the Avery/Eagle Point Mine sites.
Wetlands/Riparian	No	None occur on the Indian lands.
Surface Disturbance	Yes	About 60 acres maximum disturbance at any one time associated with the Avery/Eagle Point Mine sites.
Aesthetics	Yes	As operations expand, they will become more visible from I-84 and SR-14.
Vegetation	No	Vegetation is predominately introduced non-native noxious weeds and grasses. Will be revegetated with native species.
Wildlife	No	No significant wildlife benefits.
*When combined with existing and proposed surface mining operations in the Dallesport, Washington area.		